

James Wilkinson to Andrew Jackson, March 1, 1813, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

JAMES WILKINSON TO JACKSON.1

1 The original letter is in the Jackson MSS., and a copy is in Jackson's Letter-Book B, p. 184.

New Orleans, March 1, 1813.

Sir, I am honored by your letter of the 20th Instant, with its enclosures, for which be pleased to accept my thanks. Put faith in a soldiers word when I tell you, that altho' the experience of many years convince me, the wisest organisation of military bodies will admit but one head, I meet you with cordiality, on the ground of mutual concert and cooperation, as far as the obligations of duty and the orders of our Government may permit me. Your orders clearly justify you in acknowledging no authority but that of the President of the United States; and it is equally clear that your halt at Natchez is warranted, by every consideration of regard to the patriotic band you command, and the virtuous cause you have volunteered to serve, under circumstances which "try Men's Souls."

Were I authorised to approve, I should say that under similar circumstances, I would have adopted the course you have pursued, in the disposition of your corps; for you estimate justly the importance of keeping it together, and too much praise cannot be bestowed on men, who, in the cause of their country, voluntarily exchange the comforts of domestic ease, for the frosty bed and flimsy canopy; But Sir, let me advise you to be regardful of your Health, for disease begets discontent, and a sickly camp afflicts every

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feeling and enfeeble every faculty, I speak from the experience of 1777 in Canada and at Tyconderoga, and from successive scenes, down to the late mortality on the lakes. I would we could find action, for that will contribute to Health and insure content, But for this we must depend on the Enemy, and in the mean time, we must practice patience, the second virtue of a soldier.

Col. Covington who is placed in charge of the national arsenal at Washington Cantonment, will receive by this mail and will communicate to you my Ideas, of the course which I conceive should be pursued, for the accommodation of your Corps, and the avoidance of difficulties, in the settlements of public accounts, with which I have had heretofore much trouble. Heading an Independent corps, It follows, necessarily, that you should possess power adequate to its rightful and necessary accommodation in all things; and therefore the most plain and, to me, the most acceptable course would be, that your separate staff under your own distinct orders, should provide whatever may appertain to the Quarter Masters and medical Departments, while the Army contractor will necessarily be subject to your orders. But should you find any difficulty in the way of this proposition, Then let the permanent public agents provide and furnish, under your authority to your staff, taking their accountable receipts to the Department of war.

While I feel a proper solicitude for the correctness of my own conduct, and experience has taught me caution, I have no disposition to split Hairs or make difficulties; For the march of two Thousand Free men, a thousand miles in the dead of winter, for the public defense, is a novel scene, which must call forth the sympathies of every Patriot Bosom, and intitle the actors to extraordinary indulgence. I regret your Dragoons are not armed, because I have not the means to supply the defect, for I assure you, we have not in all our stores fifty swords, altho' I have again and again written for five hundred. Cannot you convert those of that corps who are unarmed, into mounted Gunmen, until Cavalry Equipments may arrive? I believe we have some musquets at Washington and altho' destined to another service, you have but to confer with Col. Covington to obtain them.

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With respect to fixt ammunition for your musquets and Powder and lead for your Rifles, I am happy it is in my power to promise you an ample supply, but you must have patience for the next passage of the Steam Boat, as it is the safest and most expeditious mode by which it can be sent to you.

A few words more Sir, and I will terminate this trespass; The law under cover will account to you, for the attempts which have been made, to Inlist into the Regular army from the Volunteer Corps; I understand those attempts are offensive and have put a stop to them, as far as I dare, in the inclosed order.²

² The order, Mar. 2, 1813, is in Jackson MSS., Letter-Book B, p. 187, and is as follows:

“G. Order. The enlistment of volunteers into the Regular service is not to be attempted, without the consent of the commanding officers of those corps: Yet every exertion is to be made, by all legitimate means, to fill the ranks of the established corps. The District Paymasters are to furnish the necessary recruiting funds, taking the proper receipts, from the recruiting officers.

“The corps of militia from the Mississippi Territory, who turned out, on call of their country, are to be discharged, by their commanding officer Brigadier Genl. Claiborne, when that officer may think proper: Lieutenant Knight, the district paymaster is to pay the corps to the day of its discharge; and Maj. Genl Wilkinson feels it his duty to offer his warm thanks to those meritorious citizen soldiers for the promptitude with which they took arms in the cause of the nation, and the good conduct they have observed while in service. He doubts not that on any future call, they will manifest the same spirit; and he wishes them every happiness on their return to the bosom of their families.

James Wilkinson.”

I conclude by beseeching you to suffer no want, accommodation or convenience, in my power to remedy or furnish; the character and the conduct of your Corps, such as it comes

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to me, from all persons and all quarters, deserve every thing from their country, and as far as my means extend they shall not be disappointed.

With much consideration and respect,